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National Report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21*

Panama

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I. Introduction

1. Panama is determined to promote, protect and strengthen human rights through the implementation of policies based on respect and non-discrimination. Accordingly, the Government's efforts are directed towards the realization of full democracy, as reflected in the various actions taken to give effect to the recommendations accepted by Panama in 2010.

2. The Republic of Panama views the universal periodic review as a tool for self-analysis which provides an accurate overview of the general situation with respect to human rights at the national level.

3. This report for the second cycle of the universal periodic review details the achievements made in the area of human rights and the challenges that must be addressed in the short, medium and long term in order to continue to promote and protect the fundamental rights of Panamanian citizens and foreign nationals alike throughout the national territory.

II. Methodology

4. Following its universal periodic review in 2010, Panama proceeded to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, and likewise presented an open invitation in the Human Rights Council, to the human rights special procedures and mechanisms of the universal and regional human rights system.

5. The report submitted by Panama for the second review cycle is the result of a large number of meetings chaired and coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the auspices of the National Human Rights Commission, which is composed of representatives of the three branches of Government, including the Ombudsman's Office, and is attended by academics, human rights experts and civil society organizations.

6. In preparing the country report, the National Human Rights Commission held eight working sessions during which it consulted civil society organizations with a view to providing them with a preliminary document for their consideration and comments.

7. After having received comments from the different civil society actors advocating the protection and promotion of human rights, the National Human Rights Commission adopted the document as an objective and accurate report to the Human Rights Council on the human rights situation in Panama.

III. Institutional strengthening

A. Ombudsman's Office

8. **Recommendation No. 20 CERD-2010/UPR 68.7.** The Ombudsman's Office, which was set up by Panama to protect and promote human rights, is stepping up its efforts to ensure respect for the rights of all those resident in the national territory.

9. The Office recognizes the importance of continuing to strengthen the training of public officials in various areas to enable them to properly discharge and give effect to their constitutional obligations, and requests that additional human, financial and infrastructural resources and equipment be provided to it as soon as possible.

10. The recommendations formulated by regional and universal human rights bodies in 2012 led to the creation of the Anti-Discrimination Unit. In 2013, working with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, (OHCHR), the Unit devised a guide on dealing with complaints in cases of racial discrimination against indigenous and Afro-descendant populations.

11. To date, the guide has helped to confirm 12 complaints of acts of discrimination, of which 50 per cent have been resolved amicably, 25 per cent have been dropped and the remainder have been resolved by the competent authorities.

B. Prison Training Academy

12. **Recommendation UPR-68.19.** The Prison Training Academy, under the Directorate General of the Prison System, is responsible for providing training on technical areas related to the prison system, to all public officials working within the prison system and private persons, with a focus on penal enforcement.

13. The Prison Training Academy offers two types of training. The first is a basic course for prison officers which focuses on physical, academic and professional training. The second consists of courses for prison staff aimed at preventing corruption and incorporating good practices.

14. The Academy has carried out training on preventing, investigating and punishing torture with the guidance of the Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Panama undertakes to make this a standard component of the basic training provided to prison officers.

15. Since 2011, the Academy has trained 709 prison officers, who will gradually replace members of the National Police working in the country's prisons, including those in police stations.

C. National Coalition for Development

16. The National Coalition for Development is the national institution responsible for consulting with the different sectors of civil society and building consensus. Its mission is to help build a society that is more democratic, equal, prosperous, dynamic and balanced in its development, for example by widening the Panama Canal.

17. The mechanism for verifying and monitoring the implementation of the agreements and objectives of the National Coalition for Development was approved by Act No. 20 of 2008, which also approved the creation of the Council of the National Coalition for Development as a national public-private institution responsible for involving the public in consultations and in monitoring compliance with those agreements and objectives.

18. The Council of the National Coalition for Development is currently holding consultations with a view to drafting a proposal for strategic lines of action for meeting the objectives set by the National Coalition for Development. The proposal should set out a methodology which will serve as the basis for redefining the objectives of sustainable and equitable economic development.

D. National Human Rights Commission

19. Following its first universal periodic review by the Human Rights Council, the Republic of Panama established, by executive decree, a national standing commission to ensure compliance with and follow-up to the human rights obligations incurred by Panama at the national and international levels.

20. The Commission's functions include drafting national human rights reports, helping to design and coordinate government policies and action to protect human rights, and promoting the drafting of human rights bills.

21. The Commission is currently helping in efforts to secure the approval of the bill submitted to the legislature to make the minimum age of marriage the same for both men and women, and other activities aimed at giving effect to pending recommendations.

IV. Achievements, best practices and challenges

A. Administration of justice

Judicial independence

22. **Recommendation UPR-69.19.** As part of efforts to put in place measures to promote the independence of the judiciary, a judicial service bill establishing, inter alia, a special court on judicial integrity and transparency with responsibility for determining and imposing penalties for offences by judicial officers, was submitted to the National Assembly. The justice system also has a Code of Judicial Ethics.

23. The Judicial Council is the consultative body of the judicial branch of government, and its functions include ensuring the independence and efficiency of courts and regulating the judicial career path on behalf of justice officers. On occasion, the Council may invite members of civil society to attend.

Access to justice

24. **Recommendations UPR-68.26/69.10/69.16/69.17/69.18/CERD-3/CCPR-7.** Work is being carried out to give effect to the provisions of the Charter of Rights of Persons Brought to Justice, which was approved by Decision No. 244 of 2011 and sets out the rights of users of the justice system, which is intended for the general public.

25. In its efforts to improve access to justice, the judiciary set up a coordinating committee for projects to assist vulnerable groups. In accordance with Act No. 82 of 2013, women victims of violence receive free legal assistance, irrespective of their socioeconomic situation, from the Office of Free Legal Aid to Crime Victims.

26. There is also the Judicial Documentation Centre, whose task is to select, collate, process and publish information on judicial, legislative, jurisprudential and doctrinal matters, which is available to all users of the justice system. In this way, anyone can access the rulings of the Supreme Court of Justice via the Internet. (http://www.organojudicial.gob.pa/cendoj/)

27. The Community Judicial Facilitators Programme is a mechanism for overcoming administrative and legal barriers restricting vulnerable users' effective access to justice, by making possible coordinated action with community support, which helps translate into reality an institutional policy of service to society and preventive justice. There are 969 community judicial facilitators.

28. Following the approval of the Brasilia Regulations Regarding Access to Justice for Vulnerable People, by Decision No. 245 of 2011, measures have been adopted to guarantee access to justice for all with a view to providing high-quality service and assistance that ensure the effective recognition of their rights.

29. The judiciary and the Public Prosecution Service each have a National Directorate for Alternative Dispute Settlement Methods, which offer alternative means for peaceful resolution of disputes. Judicial and extrajudicial mediation centres have been set up to handle criminal, civil and family cases, cases related to free competition, and agricultural, community and consumer matters.

30. In an effort to relieve the country's judicial offices, of administrative tasks, the platform of common services, the purpose of which is to coordinate the judicial support units and assist judicial offices in all matters concerning communications, citations and other legal acts, has been expanded.

Impunity

31. According to the report on resolved cases of domestic violence against women and sexual crimes against children and adolescents, a high percentage of proceedings were stayed in 2013. The State therefore wishes to strengthen its mechanisms and devise strategies to combat such violence more effectively.

32. The administration of justice is investigating the alleged crimes against life and personal integrity and the allegation against the public administration for abuse of authority and exceeding its powers, that occurred in Bocas del Toro province in 2010, and against the persons who, at that time, occupied the posts of Minister for Security, Minister for Labour and Workforce Development and Director General of the National Police.

33. In reparation for the harm caused, Panama decided to grant financial assistance, and to that end, a high-level committee was set up by executive decree. The committee has worked with the persons concerned to prepare a bill that, inter alia, recognizes the ongoing nature of this financial assistance and provides for the establishment of a care clinic.

The right to a defence, pretrial detention and the duration of legal proceedings

34. **Recommendations UPR-68.25/69.20/69.21/69.22/69.23 and CCPR-12 and 13.** An important step forward has been the progressive implementation of the adversarial model of criminal justice, which is based on the recognition of the fundamental rights and guarantees of those involved in criminal proceedings.

35. The adversarial system is characterized by the promptness of the judicial response that it offers, which serves to reduce what is referred to as the judicial backlog. Since its introduction, in the areas where it is operational, there has been a 49 per cent reduction in the time taken to process and resolve cases compared with the time taken under the semi-inquisitorial system of criminal procedure.

36. The Public Defender Service plays an important role in resolving cases in the judicial districts where the adversarial criminal justice system is in place, and they have been involved in 72 per cent of cases in the second judicial district and in 74 per cent of cases in the fourth judicial district.

37. The Automated Judicial Management System, which is a tool for storing, processing and managing data, thereby facilitating the systematization of the information, has been introduced.

38. The establishment of temporary relief courts helps reduce the number of cases and improves implementation of the adversarial criminal justice system; it shortens the time

taken to resolve conflicts; and it speeds up throughput of criminal, civil and family cases by resolving conflicts expeditiously in accordance with the principles of orality, plurality of parties and immediacy.

39. A building called "the Prison Palace" was recently constructed in the La Joya penitentiary complex for the purpose of conducting hearings in person and avoid delays in trials due to the complexities of transferring detainees from one place to another.

40. As an alternative to prison for offenders who are drug users, drug treatment courts have been established to promote their recovery and reintegration back into society and work, and reduce recidivism.

B. Citizen security

41. Education is a key factor in promoting the culture of human rights at all levels of the police force, and police officers receive training on human rights and training courses are held with experts in this field in cooperation with the Ombudsman's Office.

42. Panama carries out various programmes with the participation of civil society, such as "Neighbourhood Watch", "Business Watch", "Transport Watch" and "Safe Neighbourhoods", which provide support and are in direct contact with police stations, working together to remain vigilant and to protect the life and property of the general public.

Sexual exploitation

43. To receive complaints of sexual offences there is a hotline manned by qualified staff; there is also a special unit of the National Police to investigate this type of crime. Moreover, the training provided to police units has been improved by the inclusion in the curriculum of the subjects of human rights, dealing with and preventing gender-based violence, dealing with young people at social risk, and gangs.

44. The Government of Panama signed an agreement with the company that manages Tocúmen Airport to enforce Act No. 16 of 2004, which allocates 1 dollar per foreign national leaving the Panamanian territory to monitoring of the National Plan for the Prevention and Elimination of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents.

45. The Secretariat for the Protection of Victims, Witnesses and Other Participants in Criminal Proceedings (SEPROVIT) was strengthened in order to make specialized provision for children and adolescents. In addition, the Hogar Malambo is to carry out a project to prevent sexual exploitation of children and adolescents and provide support to victims, primarily targeting ninth-graders, parents, guardians and key actors, in the West Panama sector.

46. The foundations of the proposed observatory on sexual exploitation of children and adolescents have been laid down, in a technical cooperation agreement signed in 2014. The observatory will generate up-to-date information that will inform the decision-making process for public policies.

47. Special training has been given to staff involved in investigating this crime and to judicial officials.

48. In 2013 and 2014, the National Commission for the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation (CONAPREDES) carried out the "I am not a Toy" campaign, on mechanisms for citizens' complaints and the protection of children and adolescents, which was launched at Tocúmen International Airport and through the mass media.

Trafficking in persons

49. Following ratification and entry into force of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the three Protocols supplementing the Convention, the Republic of Panama adopted Act No. 79 of 2011 on trafficking in persons and related activities, to implement measures on prevention and on protection and care for victims of this crime. The Act provides for the establishment of an inter-institutional committee to devise a national policy to combat trafficking.

50. The Committee devised a national plan for the period 2012–2017 based on five strategic guidelines which include the monitoring and evaluation of the plan itself, i.e., evaluation of ways to step up action to address shortcomings.

51. Under Act No. 121 of 2013, special investigative techniques such as undercover operations, surveillance and monitoring are being introduced, and mechanisms for international cooperation on organized crime, and joint investigation teams, are being set up to improve the investigation of crimes such as human trafficking.

52. Eleven formal investigations have been opened into allegations of trafficking in persons for labour or sexual purposes. Eight persons have been sentenced for the crime of trafficking in persons, incurring penalties ranging from 10 to 16 years in prison.

C. Persons deprived of their liberty

53. Act No. 55 of 2003 on reorganization of the prison system and Executive Decree No. 393 of 2005 on regulation of the Panamanian prison system make reference to the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners and comply with the relevant international human rights standards. Panama recognizes that these rules are still not fully implemented. However, efforts have been made recently to take specific measures, as detailed below.

54. In December 2014, the adult prison population stood at 15,360 persons deprived of their liberty while prison capacity was 14,174. The actual capacity of the prison system is 8,576 persons deprived of their liberty owing to the fact that the last prison built, namely La Gran Joya, which can hold up to 5,504 people, is not yet fully occupied.

55. Of the total prison population, 1,032 were women and 14,328 men; 13,746 were Panamanian nationals and 1,614 foreign nationals. There are plans to conduct a prison census, which contains a question on racial self-identification.

56. **Recommendation UPR-68.20.** Panama is undertaking a three-pronged reform focusing on respect for the rights and dignity of persons deprived of their liberty and prison staff; ensuring their safety and that of the general public; and the social reintegration of persons deprived of their liberty once they have served their sentence.

57. A workplan with short, medium and long-term goals has been devised. The following short-term goals have been attained:

(a) The re-establishment of the Prison Policy Council, a mechanism that allows the different State institutions and civil society to find joint solutions to the problems facing the prison system;

(b) A protocol for granting human rights organizations access to prisons as a way of ensuring transparency of prison administration;

(c) A protocol for action in case of death of a person deprived of liberty to ensure that the facts are investigated and that the family is notified in an appropriate manner;

(d) Studies for the design of a new prison in the province of Colón, with technical guidance to ensure that it meets all the relevant standards;

(e) Training and continuous assessment of all prison staff, including directors and administrative and security staff, through the Prison Training Academy.

58. **Recommendation CCPR-11.** Establishment of the inter-institutional working group to reduce prison overcrowding, comprising representatives of, inter alia, the Directorate General of the Prison System, the Ministry of the Interior and Justice, the Public Prosecution Service, the judiciary, the Panama Bar Association, the National Police and the National Assembly, to find joint solutions to the high level of overcrowding in Panamanian prisons, and it has managed to get the rate of transfer from prison to trial up from 40 per cent to 60 per cent, which helps to expedite pending cases.

59. The Remote Criminal Hearing Project, whereby hearings can be held without the need to transfer prisoners to the court, thereby expediting proceedings, is now being developed and rolled out.

60. Between August and October 2014, 253 persons deprived of their liberty who have participated in study or work programmes inside or outside prison were released on commutation of their sentence. In January 2015, 122 persons deprived of their liberty were granted probation. Persons detained on administrative grounds are also being released once they have served two thirds of their sentence, and the possibility of using electronic tags as an alternative to prison is also being considered.

61. An occupancy plan is in place for the El Renacer prison, which can hold 350 people and has been designated as a sentence serving facility, in which only persons who have been convicted may be held. Thus the process of separating pretrial detainees from convicted persons has begun and will continue in other prisons.

62. There has not been a prison in the province of Darién since 2011. Consequently, plans for building a prison in the province are being drawn up.

63. Panama recognizes the need to continue working to improve health care and access to medication, clean water and food; to ensure the efficient transfer of persons deprived of their liberty to court or hospital; and to reduce overcrowding in prisons.

D. Women

64. Significant progress has been made towards achieving gender equality through the adoption of laws criminalizing femicide and laws on trafficking in persons and female sterilization, and through the adoption of the State Policy on Equal Opportunities for Women following consultations with civil society. The action plan for 2015–2019 implementing this policy will be rolled out during the first quarter of 2015.

65. **Recommendation UPR-68.15.** Regional headquarters for the national machinery for women have been set up, a new shelter has been opened in Chiriquí, the shelter in the capital has been renovated and a centre providing comprehensive care to women victims of violence and their children has been built in Colón.

66. In terms of the economy and work, women's participation in the labour market has increased, although the biggest increase has been in the informal sector. Despite greater participation, women still do not enjoy equal pay or the opportunity to occupy leadership or decision-making positions on an equal footing with men.

67. In education there has been a significant increase in female participation. More women tend to remain in education and graduate than men, especially at the secondary and tertiary levels. The Institute for Women of the University of Panama satisfies the

requirements of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) at the tertiary level by incorporating the gender perspective through its Master's programme in gender issues.

68. **Recommendations UPR-68.21/69.12/69.13/CEDAW-27.** Act No. 82 of 2013, which prescribes measures to prevent violence against women and amends the Criminal Code to criminalize femicide and to punish violence against women, reflects a consensus within the State and a recognition of women's rights, and a commitment to addressing the problem in a comprehensive manner.

69. In addition to criminalizing femicide and increasing penalties, the Act provides for the development of public policies to prevent, punish and eradicate violence against women. Furthermore, a national committee of key institutions and organizations has been set up to follow up on that.

70. The judiciary and the Public Prosecution Service, through the Judicial Training College and the Clara González de Behringer School, provide training in gender equality and non-discrimination against women to judicial officials and other bodies that work with the judiciary.

E. Children and adolescents

71. Following the creation of the National Secretariat for Children, Adolescents and the Family (SENNIAF), plans, programmes and protective measures for children and adolescents have been put in place, taking account of the fact that children and adolescents constitute a vulnerable group. The opening of regional offices has served to increase the number of prevention and care services for children and adolescents and extended their coverage.

72. **Recommendation UPR-68.28.** Strategies to step up birth registration for children and adolescents in rural and indigenous areas and border areas have been launched. However, under-registration in indigenous areas still remains high at 22 per cent.

73. Quality standards and regulations are being developed for the care of children in Children and Family Guidance Centres (COIF), with a human rights focus.

74. Three hundred and ninety employees and specialists from 28 alternative care centres and homes for children and adolescents have received training on the Protocol for Dealing with Children without Parental Care, and workshops have been held for children and adolescents, to promote and publicize their rights in schools, care institutions and communities, and have been attended by approximately 8,800 children and adolescents.

75. To assist children in conflict with the law, in 2014 the National Secretariat for Children, Adolescents and the Family helped 40 teenagers by prescribing rehabilitation measures consisting of psychosocial counselling and the monitoring of their performance in school; 28 of them received voluntary vocational training in workshops on electrotechnical systems, upholstery and beauty care; 25 took part in a workshop on emotional self-awareness; and 25 received training on the dangers of drug abuse. Eighty-five per cent of them have rejoined the education system; 40 per cent have begun gaining work experience while they study; and 45 per cent participate in the "Make Your Mark" prevention programme.

76. The most recent survey on child labour, which was conducted in 2012, indicates that 50,410 children aged between 15 and 17 are part of the country's economically active population, accounting for 5.6 per cent of the total, which shows a decrease compared with the 10.8 per cent recorded in 2008.

77. In this group, 74 per cent are boys and the remaining 26 per cent are girls. The problems are greatest in rural areas and in certain districts which, together, are home to 73.2 per cent of working children. While the country has made progress compared to the results of previous surveys, the annual reduction rate stands at barely 1 per cent, underscoring the need to step up efforts to eradicate child labour and create the conditions that will allow this group to lift itself out of its current situation of poverty and vulnerability.

F. Indigenous peoples

78. Legislation on protection of the rights of the indigenous peoples has been adopted over the last four years: Act No. 88 of 2010, which recognizes the languages and alphabets of the indigenous peoples of Panama and sets standards for intercultural bilingual education; Act No. 11 of 2012, which establishes a special regime for the protection of mineral, water and environmental resources in the region of Ngäbe Bugle; and Act No. 33 of 2012, which creates new districts and towns in the region of Ngäbe Bugle.

79. **Recommendation UPR-68.35.** Act No. 64 of 2013 established the Office of the Deputy Minister of Indigenous Affairs, whose functions are to plan, direct and coordinate the State's policy on indigenous peoples. In 2014, efforts were made to mediate and settle a dispute over the governance of the indigenous regions.

80. The comprehensive development of the indigenous peoples of Panama is being promoted through the participation of the 7 indigenous peoples and the 12 traditional structures, who have helped formulate the National Development Plan, which aims to reduce inequality.

81. The State recognizes the inequality between the rural, urban and indigenous regions. Programmes and policies on primary and comprehensive health care are currently being rolled out. These include the Salud Mesoamérica 2015 Initiative, the Water and Environment Programme, the Child Nutrition Programme, the Opportunities Network Programme, the Basic Sanitation Project 100/0 and the policy to prevent sexually transmitted diseases.

82. **Recommendation UPR-69.31.** Act No. 72 of 2008 sets out the special procedure for granting a collective title to land belonging to indigenous peoples who do not reside in the indigenous regions and is regulated by Executive Decree No. 223 of 2010.

83. A number of working sessions are being held to process applications for the collective title to lands in the indigenous communities of Dagargunyala, Emberá-Wounaan de Alto Bayano and Naso Tjërdi. Work is also under way to give effect to the ruling of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in the case involving the Kuna de Madugandí and Emberá de Bayano peoples.

84. **Recommendation UPR-69.32.** In June 2014, a bill on the consultation and free and informed consent of indigenous peoples was submitted to the National Assembly. It establishes the right of indigenous and native peoples to be consulted whenever legislative or administrative measures that may affect them are proposed.

85. The State is mediating the conflicts generated by the construction of the Chan 75 hydroelectric dam in Ngäbe-Bugle, Bonyic-Naso and Genisa-Ngäbe Bugle (Barro Blanco).

86. As part of the implementation of the adversarial criminal justice system, meetings have been held with traditional authorities to identify common ground and those areas which require coordination between traditional justice and ordinary justice in the region of Ngäbe Bugle.

G. Afro-descendants

87. Panama recognizes the existence of racial discrimination and the need to continue to adopt laws and policies to combat it.

88. Respect for the rights of the Afro-descendant population is an important issue for the State and instruments such as the public policy on equal opportunities and other anti-discrimination measures have been adopted to curb discrimination. In 2012, a number of Afro-descendant women joined the National Council on Women.

89. As a way of reaffirming Black heritage and Afro-descendants' contribution to the country's culture, Braids Day was proclaimed, and is celebrated on 20 May as part of Black Ethnic Community Month.

90. **Recommendation CERD-10**. In the 2010 census, 303,289 persons self-identified as Afro-descendants, accounting for 9.2 per cent of the total population. Three years later, the multiple indicator cluster survey recorded 564,005 persons of African descent, accounting for 14.9 per cent of the population.

91. Panama recognizes the need to enact comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation prohibiting discrimination on all grounds, including racial and ethnic discrimination, providing for effective enforcement mechanisms and adequate resources, and prescribing appropriate civil and criminal penalties for acts of discrimination committed by public or private actors.

H. Persons with disabilities

92. Persons with disabilities constitute one of the country's vulnerable populations. Apart from the first national survey on the prevalence of disability (PENDIS) 2005–2006, no more up-to-date information is available. However, the State reiterates its firm commitment to conducting research that will produce new statistical data and that will inform the development of public policies in that area.

93. A study is being conducted to assess the situation in inclusive schools; to evaluate the nature of the teaching, family and student environments for inclusive education and the contextual factors; and to conduct a needs assessment as a basis for a proposed national action plan on inclusive education.

94. Under Act No. 39 of 2012, a special financial assistance programme was set up for persons with severe disabilities who are dependent on others and who live in extreme poverty, with a view to improving their quality of life by providing them with financial support that would allow them to meet their basic needs in terms of food, medication and access to services.

95. Act No. 134 of 2013 establishes economic equality for persons with disabilities and, as a measure of affirmative action, provides for a number of benefits for them.

96. Executive Decrees Nos. 36 and 37 of 2014 regulate the procedure governing the structure and functioning of the disability assessment boards, the relevant national scales and the procedure for evaluating, assessing and certifying disabilities.

97. Panama reiterates its commitment to consulting with disabled persons' organizations and will strengthen the technical and administrative measures in place to ensure the full exercise of this right.

98. SOLCA is an open-source freeware program that allows persons with disabilities to work independently in various settings, including in educational, employment and social

settings, to ensure their social inclusion. Training has been provided to promote its use in the different State institutions.

99. The subject of disabilities was taken up by the National Platform for Comprehensive Disaster-Risk Management, an awareness-raising campaign to prevent accidents and disability was launched, and an action plan to lay down the actions and procedures intended to ensure a rapid disaster response was devised.

I. LGBTI population

100. The State of Panama recognizes the existence of discrimination against lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual and intersex persons. To address the situation, a representative of this group has joined the National Commission against Discrimination, to which complaints can be made against public officials who commit acts of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity.

101. Talks have also been held with public officials from various State bodies in order to examine alleged discriminatory treatment by law enforcement officials.

102. An awareness-raising campaign and other actions to counter homophobia have been carried out to disseminate a message of tolerance, respect and equal opportunity.

J. Migrants and refugees

103. Between 2010 and 2014, a total of 112,336 persons obtained migration status of some kind in the Republic of Panama, depending on type of residence permit, or else opted to regularize their situation through the "Crisol de Razas" programme. It is now possible to obtain permanent resident status directly through a wider range of migratory permits.

104. Of the total number of persons who were granted a residence permit over the period 2010–2014, 59 per cent were men and 41 per cent were women.

105. Panama recognizes the need to improve migration hostels and, to that end, has invested in bringing their infrastructure up to the required standard. Panama will continue making such improvements and has made it a priority to maintain and improve health care and coordination with consulates and governmental and non-governmental institutions.

106. To date, Panama has recognized the refugee status of 2,237 persons. It granted refugee status to 100 persons in 2013 and 29 in 2014.

107. **Recommendations UPR-68.37/70.20/70.21.** The State is working with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on the quality assurance initiative (QAI) to strengthen national refugee status determination and has improved interview procedures and the procedures for obtaining information from the country of origin in order to submit more detailed information to the Commission so that it can better justify its decisions. Moreover, there are plans to amend Executive Decree No. 23 of 1998 to bring it into line with international standards.

108. **Recommendation CRC-65.** It has been decided that children and adolescents are to be included in the refugee status determination process, and the manual on conducting interviews, which is to be issued under QAI, will contain a section on how to do so without infringing their rights, especially if they are unaccompanied.

K. Poverty

109. **Recommendations UPR-69.25/69.26.** The goal of halving the proportion of the total population living on less than 1 dollar per day was met by the Republic of Panama before the 2015 deadline, according to the fourth report of Panama on the Millennium Development Goals, which indicates that, in 1991, 29.2 per cent of the population lived on less than 1 dollar a day and that, in 2012, the proportion dropped to 9.7 per cent, though the target was 14.6 per cent.

110. The reduction in poverty and extreme poverty between 2005–2013 is attributable to several factors. These include achievements in the areas of the economy and employment, such as an average economic growth rate of 8 per cent, a drop in unemployment from 9.8 per cent to 4.1 per cent, and an increase of 67.5 per cent, in the average wage which rose from 322.3 balboas to 539.7 balboas, indicators which are among the most noteworthy in Latin America.

111. The Opportunities Network welfare programme was conceived as a government strategy to help households living in extreme poverty to meet their basic needs by providing them with direct, temporary and comprehensive relief. Since its inception, the programme has promoted the accumulation of human capital among children and young people with a view to breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty, by creating incentives for families to invest in education, nutrition, health and the development of productive capacities.

112. In 2012, the programme covered 73,775 households living in extreme poverty in 585 towns, providing them an incentive in the form of a conditional cash transfer (CCT). The programme has a beneficiary population of 72,831 households, 32 per cent of which are located in the indigenous regions, 53 per cent in rural areas and 15 per cent in urban areas.

L. Housing

113. The housing sector has grown in recent years as a result of the good performance of the Panamanian economy and the impact of the Preferential Interest Act on house building, and the growth of mortgage lending in the financial system.

114. There has been strong growth in housing supply, which has led to the launch of new housing programmes, as set out below:

- The Surveying and Legalization Programme which approved plans that made it possible to award certificates of assignment to 3,080 families, thereby benefiting more than 13,860 people, for an investment of 393,799 balboas;
- The sum of 213.4 million balboas was invested in the Housing Programme, which provided 8,950 housing solutions and benefited 40,272 people nationwide;
- The purpose of the Housing Solidarity Fund is to provide a non-transferable grant to low-income families to enable them to buy new housing. Under Executive Decree No. 393 of 2014, the grant has increased from 5,000 balboas to 10,000 balboas and the maximum house price from 40,000 balboas to 50,000 balboas. As of December 2014, 7,178 grants, to a total value of 36,069.450 balboas, have been awarded;
- The sum of 12.5 million balboas has been invested in the Housing Assistance Programme, which is intended for families affected by natural disasters or fire. The Programme has benefited 3,050 families by providing them with innovative solutions, transfers or temporary accommodation, or by rebuilding existing homes;
- Currently 1,160 loans for building materials are being processed at the national level, of which 749, to a value of 1.7 million balboas, have been granted. The sum of

30.4 million balboas has been invested in the restoration of properties that are in disrepair or deemed condemned and a danger to occupants' lives, benefiting 6,987 families;

- The Housing Savings Fund promotes the funding of social housing and contributes to the development of a national housing policy and to the establishment of a national technical assistance system through an investment of 5.4 million balboas. A total of 324 housing solutions have been provided and 134 solutions are currently being implemented.

M. Health

115. An essential function of the State is to protect the health of its inhabitants through a population policy that caters to the country's needs in terms of social and economic development.

116. Panama has presented the results of the seventh height survey of first-graders in State schools. The survey results have been used to update the information on chronic malnutrition among schoolchildren in Panama.

117. The Palliative Care Programme was set up to develop and provide high-quality health care, preferably in the home, to patients in an advanced stage of a terminal illness, efficiently and safely, with the assistance of competent, committed and caring staff, as well as families and the community.

118. Panama is working to devise a health promotion strategy focusing on prevention in partnership with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and NGOs such as PROBIDSIDA. Furthermore, the necessary mechanisms are being developed to ensure the timely supply of antiretroviral drugs, including adherence to treatment. A national information system is also being designed and updated to provide access to data giving an overview of the situation with respect to sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS in the country.

N. Education

119. Panama is aware of the importance of the subject of human rights and has rolled out programmes on human rights education as a cross-cutting theme in different schools.

120. Curriculum guidelines have been developed on comprehensive, age-appropriate sex education, defining the common content of programmes for Panamanian public and private schools. Programmes are also under way aimed at guaranteeing the comprehensive development of young people, such as "Leaders Making their Mark", whereby young people in pre-secondary and secondary education develop positive leadership skills together with their peers and take part in activities in school, such as projects on life and work, the family, sexuality and dating.

121. Other programmes have also been carried out, such as a programme for gifted students, to identify, evaluate and monitor their needs. A remedial education project has also been devised to help children and adolescents and prevent them falling behind at school, dropping out or failing.

122. The universal scholarship programme was strengthened by increasing the monthly income per student from $20 to $30 at the primary level, from $20 to $40 at the pre-secondary level and from $20 to $50 at the secondary level.

O. Employment

123. In 2005 the unemployment rate was 9.8 per cent of the economically active population whereas in 2013 it fell to 4.1 per cent.

124. Between 2004 and 2014, women's participation in the labour market increased from 46.6 per cent to 49.4 per cent, although this proportion is low given that women tend to have a higher standard of education than men. The female unemployment rate which in 2004 was 16.3 per cent, fell to 5.3 per cent in 2013. The male unemployment rate fell from 9 per cent in 2013 to 3.3 per cent in 2014.

125. Average wages have also improved as a result of increased demand for labour, a shortage of qualified staff and measures to increase the minimum wage, which means the average wage increase has remained ahead of inflation, which in turn, has led to an increase in purchasing power and in household consumption.

126. In 2014 the population in work was 1,781,266, with 85,905 unemployed. In the period from 2004 to 2014, the employed population increased by 646,536.

127. In Panama, 6.5 per cent of employees are domestic workers, less than in 2004, when the figure was 9.2 per cent. Eighty-five per cent of this work is performed by women, whose minimum wage averages 212 balboas per month. Although their working conditions have improved in recent years, the majority of female domestic workers still have no access to social security and their working hours are longer than those of other employees.

128. The minimum wage is reviewed every two years to reduce inequality in remuneration for work performed. The last minimum wage was set by Executive Decree No. 182 of 2013 on the basis of economic activities, company size, geographical region and occupation. It is important to note that it applies only to private companies.

P. Voluntary commitments

129. Panama makes a voluntary commitment to obtaining approval for the following pending tasks before the second review cycle midterm implementation assessment:

- Make the minimum age of marriage the same for both men and women;
- Establish a national mechanism for the prevention of torture;
- Adopt a law establishing a comprehensive child protection system; and
- Set up a shelter for victims of trafficking in persons which will provide basic services such as accommodation, food and health care, as well as specialized interdisciplinary assistance.